

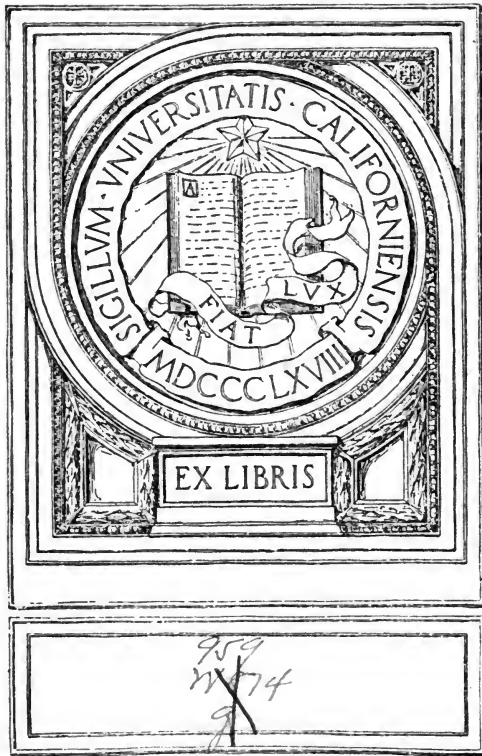
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GLAD OF EARTH

CLEMENT WOOD





GLAD OF EARTH

BY
CLEMENT WOOD



NEW YORK
LAURENCE J. GOMME
1917

TO THE
MEMBERS OF THE
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

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BY LAURENCE J. GOMME

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1917
MAIN

TO MY THREE GOOD FRIENDS
MILDRED CUMMER, MY WIFE,
LOUIS UNTERMEYER
JAMES OPPENHEIM
I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME

605436

For permission to reprint many of these polyrhythmic poems in book form, thanks are due to *The Masses*, *The Seven Arts*, *Poetry*, *The Poetry Journal*, *The Chimaera*, *The Conservator*, *The Flame*, and *The New York Call*.

CONTENTS

I. GLAD OF EARTH

	PAGE
ARISING	3
SPRING-PIECE	4
SPRING	5
ON THE EDGE OF SPRING	7
THE APRIL POND	8
WOMEN IN APRIL	10
JERSEY HILLS	11
APRIL IN ALABAMA	12
ROSE-GERANIUM	15
SHADOWS OF THE PEACH TREES	16
AN OLD-TIME NEGRO MELODY	20
LEOLA	22
SILENCE	23
HEART OF THE VILLAGE	28
THE OLD MAID	33
PORTRAIT OF THREE NUNS	34
ON THE MARRIAGE OF A SEXAGENARY WIDOWER AND THE LOVE OF HIS YOUTH	35
ONE A. M.	36
ON THE FERRY	37
THE TREE	38
NEW YEAR'S EVES	39
LOVE OUT OF FLESH	42
DUST	43
UNITY	45
UNCAGED	47
BIRTH.	50

 II. COMRADES

DAWN	59
I. BEGINNING	59
II. BEFORE THE FIRE	60
III. AS DUSK MELTS TO NIGHT	61
IV. TOGETHER	62
V. DAWNS	63
VI. UNFETTERED	65
VII. FINALLY	66
SUNRISE	67
I. APART FROM YOU	67
II. BLENDED	68
III. THIRSTY	69
INTERLUDE	70
I. ICE-LOCKED	70
II. THE WITHHOLDER	72
III. ROSY MAGIC	74
IV. FOR THE MOMENT	76
V. SLEEPLESSNESS	77
VI. THE REAL THING	79
VII. THE YARD-STICK	80
MORNING	81
I. THE LINK	81
II. THE CHAINS OF LOVE	82
III. PRELUDE	83
IV. THE SEA-SEEKER	85
V. RAINFALL	86
VI. HUGGING THE CHAINS	87

III. NEW ROADS

NEW ROADS	91
SHOP-TALK	92
TO ANY REVOLUTIONIST	94
A PSALM NOT OF DAVID	96
THE GOLDEN MIRACLE	97

Contents

vii

EARTH-MOTHER	99
THE NIGHT-SHIFT	103
A BREATH OF LIFE	106
TWO MOTHERS	107
JESTERS	117
TO A PHOTOGRAPH	118
A MEETING	119
SINGLE	121
COMRADESHIP	122
THE SOCIAL REFORMER	124
THE SOCIAL DOCTOR	126
JUDAS	128
THE CREATOR	129
MYSELF THE MOTHER	130
CLINGING	131
OUT OF THE STORM	134
THE SHINING ONES	136
A PRAYER	141



GLAD OF EARTH

I. *GLAD OF EARTH*

ARISING

THE stars sing in their courses,
And I shall sing in mine.

The winds rejoice in their delicate strength,
The seasons bend unceasingly to their tasks;
I shall rejoice as well,
I shall not fail of my tasks.

The tender grass climbs starward thru the sod,
The gnarled tree flings out its spring attire of
laughing green;
They do not hesitate, and cease their growth,
Fearful whether the cosmos has a purpose or not;
And neither shall I;
I shall climb starward, thru discarded husks of
myself;
I shall fling myself sturdily into new and sweet
directions.

The animals sharpen in strength and knowledge,
And men struggle upward,
Shaping out of their clumsy selves fairer and freer
selves.

This I shall do,
Taking the dust and the flame within me,
Mounting with them on ever loftier journeys,
Shaping of them a creator, a god.

*SPRING-PIECE**For Jean Starr Untermeyer*

THE strayed cherry tree
Bewildered by red-brick walls
In the lost by-street
Is dusted with green. . . .

Its white blossoms push
Long and scented fingers
Into the liquid air. . . .

Clouds of white butterflies
Silently drift
Like loosened and breathing petals
Seeking the sun.

SPRING

HHEY, old world, old lazy-bones, wake to the
Spring-tune!

The music of the spheres is quickened to a jig, —
Wobble a one-step along your flashing orbit, with
the moon for your light-tripping partner!

Shove your staid bonnet over your ear, proper old
lady,
And sway along the streets, tipsy with the Spring!

Here are the young men, gay in their festive lids,
Carolling vigorously the joy within them!
What matter if the tune slide up and down?
Spring is alive, and the maidens tremble to you,
as you to them.

I thrill with it too —
I long to hie me to His Honor the Mayor,
And slap him vigorously on the back, disturbing
the proper set of his derby,
And shout, "Wake up, old chap, it's Spring!"

Let the solemn judge shrug off the ermine, and join
the revellers!
Let the pompous financier sing a naughty trio with
his wife and the placid chauffeur!

And this to the Police Commissioner —
Furnish the foremost pair of your marching guard-
ians of the peace with mandolins and guitars,
And let the ranks behind decorously do the toe
dance.

Oh, the quickening of the world!
The push of the agile leaves, the fluttering mating
of birds,
The delicious unquiet of the love-hungry earth!
The awakening spirit is everywhere;
Nothing escapes; nothing can resist dancing to its
absurd and delightful melody.

ON THE EDGE OF SPRING

SO calm is the cool air,
Under the pour of the golden sunshine,
With never a shadow of a cloud, —
Ah, such a day banishes all regrets
By the sheer warrant of its serene promise.

Still is the sky,
Tranquil and unstirring the shining earth.
Were there ever activity and agony,
And pains and tearings of separation,
Here on this quiet abiding place?

THE APRIL POND

I CLIMBED down to the little pond. . . .

At my coming, the noises were hushed; —
But soon, diffidently, one by one,
The little peeper-frogs began to chirp their gossip,
A chorus swelling and sinking,
Punctuated with the croaking of the older genera-
tions.

And now, and after a pause again,
The woodpecker's vigorous rivetting dominated the
song,
A solid repetitive rhythm, beak on hollow wood.

Now the other voices —
The trilled tweet of a song-sparrow,
The plaintive metallic staccato of the kingfisher,
Broken by the far-off full-throated crow of a rooster.
In a hushed moment
The silent flash of a bird-shadow
Crossed the clear depths and sun-glitter before me.

Again the noises —
The whirr of wings upfluttering from the earth;
The sibilant rustle of a water snake on dried leaves,
Tensely hushed as I leaned toward him;
The sharp-eyed observation of a flame-breasted
robin;
The droning buzz of a motor on the unseen road
above;

The distant grunt of a freight engine;
And now, outringing all,
The melodious booming of a church-bell
Breaking over the brow of the hill,
And then it ceased, again dumb for a week.
While uninterruptedly
The choralling peepers, the twitter of birds,
Shivered the brittle stillness of the place.

WOMEN IN APRIL

APRIL — and once again the sap shoves up the
trees,
The gray mullein-pillows soften the ground,
The young green of the thistle
Pushes aside its damp wide skeleton
Of last year's leaves. . . .
Now womanhood assumes its fairest form,
Trembles shyly to love,
And to achieve the common miracle of motherhood.

Ah, slender bodies of girls,
Shaped for love, and the fruits of love, —
Are you not the ever-fresh marvel of life?

I walked down Fourteenth Street at 7:15 this
morning
To behold this marvel. . . .
I saw a jostling flood of dumpy, squat, skirted figures
Distorted in corsets, their thick ankles bulging
over shoddy leather,
Simpering, chattering, chewing gum.

And these are to be the mothers,
To bring forth the future!
Thru these ill-kept, stunted incubators
Life is to flow,
And out of their pinched wombs
We look for star-seeking visions, conquering will!

JERSEY HILLS

I SAW the low, cowed Jersey hills,
Shrivelled in the thin winter sunlight,
Sunken breasts of a sterile old woman.

And then in clear vision
I saw mother earth, with her million swelling breasts,
And her myriad hungry infants,
Crawling wearily over her sterile bosom,
Mouthing her barren nipples, for the freshening milk
Of stubbly corn and wheat, and lean, hard-fruited
orchards.

Ah, but those favored hills of my fragrant Southland,
Pouring white milk of cotton, and mellow, great-
blossomed magnolias,
And golden cream of rich, rank corn,
And copious orange acres.

*APRIL IN ALABAMA**For Salomón de la Selva*

APRIL in Alabama — and I not there!
I go about my tasks with a heavy heart,
A thousand miles from home;
O for one hour on those Alabama hills!

For there, I know, the earth is shyly putting on her
bridal flowers
For the hot embrace of summer;
And I know — who better than I? —
Where the pansy violets bloom,
Filmy petals of blue slipt from the heavens,
Under the high pines.

I know where the dogwood laughs in the valleys,
And I know where the big grape-vine swing is;
How many a time I have clung to it and flung myself
into the sky,
Then bumping back into the clumsy earth,
Where all dreams end. . . .

Now the peach-orchards are gay and delicate-
scented, —
I have tested each limb that would bear me;
I know the tangles of the blossoming blackberry,
And the waxen-bloomed May-apples on the hill-
side. . . .

Far away, by the forgotten mill-dam,
I know how to follow the spring-stream to its source,
And there, under green-shawled rocks,
Find the tiny white violets,
Blooming pearls among the emerald leaves.

Then I would range far for my armfuls of flowers;
There was always some one to give them to:
For a long time my mother, my earliest sweet-
heart;
There was a teacher I adored like a worshipper;
And an endless stream of brown eyes and gray eyes
That took my boy's heart — and my flowers.
And if ever there was no one else,
I picked them for myself. . . .

I am a part of that land;
It seeded me, budded me, brought me thru bloom
to fruitage;
Here I am like a ripe apple tumbled away from the
high tree
To the strange bottom of the hill. . . .
But that land is my mother. . . .

Oh, April is here too —
I can feel the glory of the Woolworth tower piercing
the mists of morning,
I can see beauty in an unfinished subway excava-
tion,
I love the silent canyons of streets at midnight,
And their flood of men at noon;

I see the decorous blooming of window-boxes,
And the sober flowering of New England's ordered
hills and valleys. . . .

But April in Alabama!
Could I lead you to the first pansy-violet,
Sky blooming out of earth?
Just try me once!

ROSE-GERANIUM

A PUNGENT spray of rose-geranium —
A breath of the old life.

It brings up the little five-room cottage where I was
born,
And where I grew thru a smiling childhood.

The white-bearded grandfather sits in his mended
rocking-chair,
His eyes far off, crooning "The Sweet By and By,"
Marked with the tapping of his toe upon the
weathered porch-floor,
While the sunshine drizzles thru the great oaks.

And there is my grandmother's kneeling figure,
Turning over the rich black earth with her trowel;
And the kind wrinkles on her face, as she says:
"Didn't the pansies do finely this year, Clem?
And the scarlet verbenas, and the larkspurs,
And that row of flaming salvia. . . .
Those roses . . . they're Maréchal Niels . . . my
favorites.

And, little grandson, smell this spray of rose-
geranium —

Just think, when grandmother was a little tiny girl
Her grandmother grew them in her yard!"

*SHADOWS OF THE PEACH TREES**In memory of Warfield Creath Richardson*

THE good old man is dead.
He died last night, at midnight.
Even the tiny grandchild stood by, rubbing her
sleepy eyes,
There in the little room near the naked shadows of
the peach trees.

A little child with wide eyes asked me,
"Has grandfather gone on a long journey, as they
say?"

He was always on long journeys;
His body sped forward on a never-ending pilgrimage,
Once a day spiralling earth's centre,
And, with the spinning earth for his steady car,
slowlier rounding the sun,
And ever with it plunging forward into the unfold-
ing universe.

And other journeys he took;
Often his feet walked him down the oak-avenue to
the quiet town;
His eyes roved the familiar ways of staid houses and
robing and disrobing trees,
As the impatient seasons jostled one another;
His eyes leapt up to the sun,
And into the opening star-sweet sky.

His thought travelled still further, ranging from
the formless first things,
Up the slow varyings of the centuries, and far into
the unlit future, —
And in dreams he wandered thru weirder regions,
Building and unbuilding universes.

He has ceased many journeys.
His feet stir not, but quietly point to the stars;
His eyes look outward no longer,
His thought has returned from its travels, and
bides at home.

But his scattering body and scattering soul
Still thread their tardy centre, still wind the sun,
Still whirl forward into the far ether.

Is death then no journey, no change?

The shadows of the peach trees fall across my
mind.
The tender peach-blossoms die, and we see them
no more;
But their color is not lost, and their fragrance
stays,
And the soil is rich with their decay;
They glow in the new grass,
They deepen the green of the tasselled corn.

Men die, and it is but a birth;
The man that was, queer grouping of uncounted
little worlds, active and deathless,

He is no more, — but each of these worlds speeds
on,
Faring into the petals of the peach-blossoms,
Sinewing the agile animals,
Reappearing in the flowing generations of men.

Lovelier grows the earth, as the radiant ages pass;
Nobler the forms upon it, and their fair dwellings;
Sweeter the tune that it sings as it wheels thru the
embracing ether.

Shadows of the peach trees, naked and black,
As the slow bare-headed line passes from under you
into the sun,
Bearing its frail burden,
One more life has passed thru its four seasons,
And the newer spring commences.

Open the windows and doors of the little room,
And let the freshness and balm of the spring
come in!
Let the odor of violets and the clinging fragrance of
roses possess it utterly,
Let the rounding shadows of the peach trees sprinkle
their petals within it.
Then again it will be used,
As a bridal chamber for spring-time lovers,
As a cradle-room for the birth of a baby,
As a haven for another tired and winter-bound soul.

Yet you are not forgotten, old body that was new-
born thru death in it.

Months later, forgetful ones drop voice to a whisper
and tiptoe as they pass your closed door;
Then they remember, and noisier life comes flooding
back.

And you are not forgotten, sturdy old spirit we love
so well;
In the hearts and faces of all of us you gleam and
speak,
And the shadows of the peach trees are fuller
because you dwelt with them.

AN OLD-TIME NEGRO MELODY

AS I climbed the gentle hillside,
In the earliest morning hour,
The April moon's waning crescent
Hung, rounded keel to the east, uncertainly balanced,
Below the morning star.

Then I heard an old-time negro melody,
Crooned by the wind in the leaves above me,
Or by the waning moon and the morning star;
Or by some mysterious singer — I could not tell
from where;
Sung, maybe, by my own heart to me,
In tones soft and melodious:

“Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home.”

On the hill above, I dimly saw a stooped black
figure,
Faint in the moonlight;
Some simple-hearted negro patriarch,
Leaning on a shadowy hickory stick,
Singing that old-time song.

A thin chain of golden light
Stole from the star to the toppling moon,

And it began to swing
Like some huge censer swung by the unseen angel of
the dawn;
It swung from the east down to the hilltop,
Then back again, this chariot moon. . . .
And I saw the stooped black figure no more,
But still from some far height
I heard that old-time negro melody:

“Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin’ for to carry me home.”

LEOLA

THE black and joyous spirit of Africa
Caught in a dance-hall;
The caged fire of the tropics,
The perfect flowering of burning sands and im-
measurable wildernesses,
The dark soul of the crouching and rending tiger,
The plaintive minor wail of the slave-ship
And the exiles flogged to death in rice-swamps and
cotton-fields,
The courtly grace of a kindly land,
The song of a young race, the laugh of a child
people,
Dancing and swaying in dusky abandonment, —

These you are, Leola,
Free with a five-cent glass of beer.

SILENCE

RUBY," she said at last,
After all the small-talk had been exhausted,
And clothes, food, relatives, Leander's school-work,
The new Methodist minister, the changed hours at
the railroad shops,
The young doctor who had taken the place of the
old one,
And a score of other similar topics
Had been mentioned, questioned about, exclaimed
over,
And decently interred conversationally,
"Ruby, it's been nearly five years since I've seen
you,
And then it was just for a short time, when *he*
died,
And you were so upset we couldn't talk.
And before that it had been three years — no,
four —
Since we had talked for any length of time.
Ruby," — here she shifted her seat a little further
from the table,
Applying herself more assiduously to her darning,
"Ruby, we used to have great talks together
When we were girls here, and after,
When you had married Jake Mudd, and I Henry
Brown;
And after your Leander was born,
And before my little Henry and May had died. . . .

And — somehow — we don't have those same talks
now;
Something is in the way, and I'm not rightly sure
what,
But I don't think it's in me.
What's happened to you, Ruby, that has changed
you so?"
She stopped, half-appalled at her daring,
Half-consciously virtuous at doing her duty by
her friend.

The other sat quietly,
In repose almost for the first moment of the morn-
ing;
But her two restless hands were held taut;
Then they suddenly fluttered, like the wings of a
bird in distress,
Fluttered up to her neck, and pressed her collar a
bit wider.
And then she turned to Fannie, and tho the tears
did not come,
Something was unlocked, something loosened,
As she started speaking quietly and very rapidly:
"There is a something, but I can't lay my fingers
on it;
It's not something you can touch, or rightly speak
of;
Nothing nobody's done, — but it's here just the
same,
Realler than the table there, or this henrietta I'm
working on.
I can't tell rightly how to talk about it, Fannie;

It's nothing that's happened since *he* died — that
was a part of it;
And now it's Leander too, and Jake's brother Aaron
who lives here,
And the house, and everyone I meet, —
Even you. . . .
You know we used to laugh, Fannie,
That you, as quiet as a mouse, had drawn Hank
Brown,
As noisy as a house afire,
And I, who chattered like a trill-sparrow,
Had married Jake, who never said a word
Unless you squeezed it out of him. . . .
Jake *was* good, you know, Fan; he *was* good to
me,
And he did love me; but he couldn't talk.
He used to come in, night after night, from his
work, —
We two were alone then — and never say a word,
Just leave his tin and derby and coat in the hall,
And walk thru the kitchen, and sit in the dining-
room
Reading his paper. . . . At first he used to pat me
as he passed,
Just a tap on the shoulder, to take the place of a
hello;
Then he stopped even that.
At first I would say, 'What's in the paper, dear?'
Anything to get a word out of him,
Sitting there like a very silent Sphinx itself —
And he would hand me the paper without a word.
Supper the same; evening the same;

Day after day, night after night,
With Sunday a longer silence. . . .
I used to rattle and slam the pans about, to get a
kick out of him;
Nary a word.
I used to scold and jaw and almost shake him;
Nary a word.
I used to talk and talk and talk and talk —
Nary a word.
And then Leander came. . . .
He never cooed and bubbled as other children do,
He was quiet and dour and gloomy then,
Just as you see him today.
I would talk louder and louder,
Anything to break the silence —
I talk too loud now. No use.
Jake died. . . . In some crazy moments
I wonder if he didn't do that too to spite me,
Partly to be shut of my tongue,
Partly to take away from me even the sound
Of his shutting the door as he left for work in the
morning,
And shutting it again at night,
And walking quietly around the house;
He went where he could be entirely silent.
And Aaron — when Jake's brother came here,
I said to myself, 'The man *must* talk sometimes';
He doesn't. . . .
I've grown afraid of this silence — it's got on my
nerves,
It's all I can hear. . . .
I seem to go about, groping my way in it;

Sometimes it comes over me so
I stand shaking like a leaf,
Ready to scream, to do anything, to break it. . . .
Those boarders I took, hoping they would cheer
things up, —
But do you know, Fannie, as I am a living woman,
I've heard this silence so long, I couldn't rightly
hear what they said!
Fannie, I sometimes think I can't hear anything
rightly
Except that silence. . . .”

HEART OF THE VILLAGE

SHE sat and rocked and talked contentedly
In the sunny southeastern morning porch
Of the rambling yellow boarding-house on the hill.
The new doctor's wife listened attentively to her
gossip —
For her husband's sake, she had to be nice to people;
And then, she might get some handy information.

“. . . Yes indeed, Missis Steele, I should say so!
I don't have to put foot out of the yard
To know everything that happens in the village.
Sooner or later, they all pass thru my hands,
Just as they will your husband's,
Or, by way of a joke, the undertaker's.
You've met him, I suppose — old Doc Willett —
'Doc' just in manner of speaking. . . .
And a good, upstanding man he is,
Who's buried two generations of us,
Man, woman, and child. . . .

“I never had him to board,
But he took one of my boarders once,
A young lady she was, a Miss Miller, poor girl,
A teacher, who was bad — here, you know,” —
(With a commiserating pat upon her own flat left
breast.)

“She was took down here, and died here. . . .

She did get an elegant funeral,
Before the remains was shipped to Wilkesbarre,
Where she came from. . . .
The Methodist minister officiated,
Because there wasn't an Episcopal one here. . . .

"I've had him too, the Methodist minister; he's
Mr. Jenkins,
And this is his third year in the village.
He was here with his wife and both daughters
After old Doctor Goldthwaite left us. . . .
The old doctor never had more than a dozen at his
sermons,
And I reckon Mr. Jenkins won't disturb their naps
Any more than old Doctor Goldthwaite did.

"Similar, when Doctor Buell died —
Another kind of a doctor this time! —
Your husband came, and I got to know you,
Just as I'll know the next doctor who comes.
Funny how doctors can't somehow cure themselves!
Not that there's anything ailing-looking about
Doctor Steele,
Or you either, for that matter.

"Then there's the teachers — I have four of them
now,
And another one, Miss Doane, coming after Easter,
Who's leaving Missis Ballard's house then;
Somehow they prefer to board here, —
Not that I'm saying anything against Kate Ballard
Or the scolding way she has with her. . . .

She got it natural, on both sides, from her parents. . . .

Why, Mr. Smith, the principal,
Brought his wife here, a two-days' bride
And they were here six weeks
Before they rented old Miss' Haverty's cottage.
A well-favored young man he is,
Tho hard of hearing;
And she hasn't but one fault, — she's a bit forward
for some,
Always busy attending to other folks' affairs. . . .
Her baby, they say, is a lovely infant;
What a pity it has a wen over its right eye!

“Most people, I've found, are good enough pay,
Altho I've learned my lesson, and collect in advance.
Would you believe it, Missis Steele,
It was all on account of an elderly gentleman, Mr.
Holt,
Who put on the cantata for the Sunday School.
Why, the minister himself recommended him to
me;
And he was recommended to him by just lots of
preachers from other places,
And by Mr. Sharp, the editor of the county paper.
'Do it for the church, Missis Rickett,' they told
me —
I'll *do* it for the church next time, right enough!
Well, this Mr. Holt he paid half-board down,
And the other half I was to get out of the proceeds
of the cantata.
When they held it, the newspaper got its ten dollars,

And the church took out its ten;
That left fifteen cents for me!
He owes me \$20.85 yet.
Payment in advance is my motto from now on,
Especially for church people.

“He was a queer one, this Mr. Holt,
But I’ve had queerer.
I’ve had Missis Trumper!”
(This with a self-satisfied, mystifying toss of her
head,
As if to say, “Few women could beat that!”)
“Yes ma’am, I’ve had Missis Trumper —
Off here, you know —” (With a significant gesture
Towards her smooth-parted sandy-gray hair.)
“Poor thing that she is!
She had been in society once — quite a swell —
But she would have her glass, she would have her
glass.
She paid well, too — I didn’t mind that,
But she was more trouble than she brought in,
And I cleaned her out, bag and baggage;
She’s staying at Missis Dusenbury’s now. . . .
O, I’ve had lots and lots of them!

“And then the visitors out from New York —
All summer I have a string of them,
Tho of course I take only the most genteel. . . .
Some come regularly every year,
Like Mr. and Missis Armistead;
He holds some kind of a job with a paper —

I've forgotten the name of it. . . .
But he can play on the violin beautiful,
And his wife is a perfect lady,
If they have been married four years
And haven't a baby yet. . . .

"Then my husband's brother Joe Moore,
Who works in the dry goods establishment, stays
 here;
And Mr. North, who runs it,
Takes his lunches here,
And brings up the morning New York papers every
 day. . . .
Why, almost everybody you could mention
Sooner or later comes here to stay with me, —
Just a moment, Missis Steele;
Jennie, did you order those cross-ribs from
 Norton's?
Excuse me a moment, while I see to them." . . .

THE OLD MAID

PAIN is not mine,
And pleasure does not touch me. . . .

I am a moon,
Rounded and frozen,
My flame quenched and ashen,
Giving forth only reflected light.

PORTRAIT OF THREE NUNS

THREE black automata,
Funereal figures,
Eternally mourning their suicide.

Prim, pursed lips,
Saying "No" to life.

*ON THE MARRIAGE OF A SEXAGENARY
WIDOWER AND THE LOVE OF
HIS YOUTH*

YOU have come tardily
To the wedding-sweets of your first love, —
As a late guest for a feast
Arriving when only the dessert remains. . . .

Have you found yet
That without the hale early courses
Even this is chill and insipid?

ONE A. M.

THE night rain stilled. . . .
Black streets mirrored the shivering lights,
Vacant sidewalks gleamed suavely.

A solitary jet-topped limousine,
Like a placid beetle,
Gulped its silk-clad prey
And scuttled off.

ON THE FERRY

AS we moved up the night stream
Startlingly a boat blotted out the shore-lights,
Its one sail blacker than the vacant sky
Or the shifting jet below.

A moment it quivered there,
Then slipped into the swallowing dark,
Leaving a whitening trail
Like the last saucy laugh of a girl
Tossed over her shoulder.

THE TREE

SHE saw love as a stately tree,
Lifting its graceful form toward heaven;
She worshipped it at a distance.

She did not see
The rough, useful limbs beneath,
Uncouthly supporting the lacy green tapestry;
Nor could she guess
The patient white roots, groping in cold darkness
For food and drink, that the tree might live.

NEW YEAR'S EVES

DRAW your chairs close to the leaping flames —
You who have met again with me
To feel the old year tremble into the new.

Two chairs are empty, friends,
Of that full dozen that were filled a year ago. . . .
Well, they are few, and we are many —
Come stretch our hands across the yawning gaps,
And wreathe the circle as before.

We were such friends, we who came together!
We have known life and its radiant beauty,
Under the opening eye of the day,
Thrilled by the brothering leaves of the forest,
And the surge of the shouldering crowds in the cities;
Soothed by the murmur of waves, and the gusty
winds that curl them;
All we have known,
And all we have crystallized into one fire-lit ring;
We melt all our several selves together
Into one glowing circle of friendship, solvent serene
and complete.

Yet now there are widening gaps in our souls'
accord —
No matter; come let us stretch our souls across the
yawning soul-gaps,
And wreathe the circle as before.

Fewer these nights grow;
Year after year will bring to us wider gaps;
We few remaining huddle forward,
Seeking to wreathe our scattered and shaking hands
Into the old pulsing ring . . . harder the task, and
harder . . .

At last I see, in some dim ghastly future New Year's
eve,
The ring of chairs as before, and but one form
within it.

I shall sit, crouched forward in my chair,
Staring at the fire with blinking eyes,
My shrivelled heart aching in loneliness. . . .
The fire crackles heartlessly now. . . . I am
alone. . . .

I can but potter around vacantly from chair to
chair,

Dusting with my thin handkerchief each empty seat,
Stooping to listen a long time for a ring at the door
or a step on the creaking porch,
Hearing only the vague echoes of long past steps
and greetings . . . then dusting again. . . .

"In vain, in vain, old dotard!" at last I tell
myself;

"These chairs will be empty forever. . . . And I
alone, alone. . . ."

I creep wearily back and doze,
Slumped forward in my chair.

And but one thought reassures —
There is no fire burns forever;

Even this blaze will age, and dim, and pale to its
 ashy sleep,

And that last New Year's eve, amid these chill
 chairs,

I too will softly, softly, frozen forward in my chair,
I too will dim, and in an icy sleep go as my friends
 went. . . .

How strange — how queer —

Our pulsing bodies, these warm hands I clasp, warm
 with the leaping pour of life,

Warming these chairs —

One day these chairs will be empty,

And we twelve, each with his back to earth,

Each silently shelved in the great scrap store-house
 of life,

Will lie, unwaking, unwaking. . . .

One coming to the room the morning after will see
 me carted off.

Then he will notice the stilted ring of dust-grayed
 chairs,

And he will say: "What are these doing here?
 Take them out to their airing." . . .

Almost I see them leaned against the fence,

Under the opening eye of a newer day;

Almost I hear far off the low hymn of the forgetful
 leaves,

And the swelling victorious hum of the unheeding
 crowds in the city streets, . . .

And the muffled sob of the waves . . . and the
 gasps of the winds . . .

And a vague silence. . . .

LOVE OUT OF FLESH

COME, trembling and passionate night,
Lean down from your loveless heaven, to my
embrace!

Press your dark arms around my shoulders,
Give me your full gray breasts to bruise. . . .
Your eager star-eyes cannot outshine the radiant
love in mine,
My lips would cling to your hot moon-mouth. . . .

Thus I sang to the night,
But passion was not in her.
Far scattered in a bleak eternity of space
Sputtering balls of flame spin dizzily,
Until they are frozen ash.

In me is the passion that pours on stars and moon;
Out of this flesh and this agonied brain
Come fiery floods of love, scorching the dead night.

DUST

THE dust drives up the street;
The sharp wind sweeps it clean,
And herds the huddled brown grains into the cracks
of houses,
And scatters them over the town,
And fields and forests beyond;
The grains take strange excursions,
Clinging to animals' hides, and the boots of men,
And in the grime of spokes and axles. —
The dust is silent.

But if it could speak,
And our ears catch the tangled story!
“Yesterday — yesterday —
I was here — I was there —
Tomorrow — where?”

“Yesterday I floundered in on a coasting
banana-ship,
Her decks warped with the heat of the tropic sun;
I was burnt too.” — “And I,” said another,
“Yesterday I rose to the gale from a noisy spot in
far Montenegro,
Where foul-running blood muddied the clean dirt
of the fields.”—
“And I topped a sand-whirl in Sahara.”—
“I lay in John Brown's unkempt broadbrim,

As he crept, with four sons, to Ossawatomie, in the night." —

"I lay on a polished piece of fruit,
Served to a queen, and a snake coiled beneath me." —

"I sifted from above a cave-mouth
Where naked, blue-smear'd men writhed bloodily
Over a carcass." — "I was in that carcass." —
"Yesterday," said another, "I saw the lake yield
forth vast moving things,
That towered over the trees, and I was stirred
By wings that darkened the sun." —

"Yesterday, I remember, there was no stir anywhere
Except the shaken hills, wrung from within." —

"And I," said one, "was part of a hot whirl of sun-mist

Coiling into an earth-ball." —

"And I," said another —

But one broke in:

"Tomorrow, I will not be here!

I will be away, where gorged vultures swell,
Tearing the last poor slaughtered human." —

"And I will see the big dust-grain we cling to
Slow in its circling the sun,
And near it, and sink with a throatless gasp
Into its hot embrace." —

"Tomorrow we will see great things," said all together. —

And again the dust was silent.

UNITY

I AM waking to the vision of what I am,
And the wonder of it blinds the eyes of my
spirit.

~~Say~~, am I kin to this firm earth I tread,
To this hale and hearty tree-bark I stroke with my
eager fingers,
To this buoyant air my body swims thru?

The loving clasp of the city, the kiss of the wind,
The tree that laughs a rustling greeting to me,
They are not my friends, or my cousins, or my
brothers and sisters;
The softly-singing earth, the restless universe, is
not my mother;
There is a closer bond, there is a stronger tie,
I am even nearer than this.

I am the melodious earth and the shining heavens,
They pass into me and thru me unceasingly,
And I into them and thru them unceasingly.

Today I crossed the river with a friend,
We marvelled together at the shimmer of the waves;
But I wonder if he knew, and I think he did,
That what had been me was now those restless waves;
That I flowed with their flow, and ebbd with their
ebb;

That they were a part of me, even as I of them;
That they rose on the unseen wings of the winds
 and passed into me, even as he stood beside me;
That what was now me would soon pass into their
 graceful strength.

Ah, it is not that the waves and the winds are
 useful to me,
Not that I take from them fuel and food for the
 eager car of my spirit,
But that they are me, and I them;
I breathe the air,
But as surely the air breathes me,
The streets and the forests breathe me as I walk
 among them,
The baffling waters drink me in great draughts,
And at last my larger self, the thirsty universe,
Breathes me and drinks me wholly.

And when that time has come,
I shall not mourn;
I shall not be done with life and living;
I shall not be translated to a new world, or a new
 universe;
I shall not slouch down to an eternal sleep.

Ah, the restless life in me will flow on with unlesened
 vigor,
I shall radiate forth into the winds of heaven,
I shall wing the buoyant depths of the sea,
I shall surge in the rock, and the plastered walls of
 houses,
I shall exult in the brown dust.

UNCAGED

I AM smeared over with civilization,
The strait-jacket clings close to me, and bites
into my expanding spirit,
I keep the coat and vest of my manners decorously
buttoned,
I do not swear before ladies, and rarely eat with my
knife, —
But how deep is this smear, this glittering varnish?
What keys unlock the cages of the watchful brutes
within?
And how near are their furtive forms to the surface?

At eleven I sat properly in the parlor of a friend,
Yawning the customary nothings of such gatherings, —
Then I went home alone in the night.
At twelve, I passed into the shadows of some
mighty oaks
That grew on the hill, over the sleeping city,
Their trunks rising solemnly
To the joyous embrace of the high branches
above,
And these whispering to the absorbing moon.

The shadows of the branches lay before me, gray
against the silver ground, —
My shadow slipped from me, and clambered the
interlocked tree-shadows,

Even to the dizziest tree-tops —
And I stopped, a tiny erect figure beneath those
tall forms.

And then a whimsical fancy seized my mind, —
The chains of the ages melted away,
The generations dissolved from around me,
A surge of feeling swept up from the soft soil thru
my feet,
My shadow quivered in the shadows of the
branches,
My eyes darted from branch to branch —
What is that dim figure there teetering from the
high bending limb?
My muscles ache to hang in the shove of the
breeze,
My fingers are hungry for the rough grip of the
rasping bark.

I am no man, but a mighty ape,
Huge-limbed, great-chested, bristly with hair;
My eyes snap, my unfleshed teeth gnash one
another,
My agile toes writhe within my shoes,
My mighty arms beat on the drum of my breast,
The vigorous rhythm sets the shadows dancing in
time.

A traveller passes on the road nearby;
I melt into the dusk of a tree-trunk, peering at the
solitary walker,
Half of a mind to rush out upon him.

And where is my mate, O shadowy dusk of the
tree-trunks?

Leave off your gossiping, long-winded branches,
and tell me of her;

Will she swing down from you to me, great ape-
faced moon?

My lips utter a queer guttural sound,
Far in the back of my mouth the warm and bitter
taste of blood.

And then the feeling lifted,
I was the man once more. . . .
Shaking with amazement and mirth, I left off
beating my breast,
I went home to sleep between sheets.

BIRTH*For Eugenie Marx*

IN the hush of late March nights,
Down the somber aisles of the pine-trees,
Under the glow of the winter stars in the west
And the tenderer shine of the young spring stars
in the east,
At last to a south-sloping hillside, dear to me since
I was only a tiny girl,
I creep —
Hugging the fragrant rough-barked friends,
Clasping in rapture the warm moist earth,
Burrowing deep in the carpeting needles, making a
cushion soft and delicate,
I lie here, body to earth, feet tapping the ground
in pure joy;
Yet much of the time silent, waiting, listening.

For lo — I have seen pushing up thru the earth
Pale leaf-stalks, soon unfolding into leaves,
Bearing, clasped to their sealed hearts,
The great-faced woodland violets —
And ever I watch for the blossoms' appearing.

Hushed is the night, with a quivering drowsiness,
Soft sougning of the pine-needles overhead, queru-
lous at the push of the wind,
And the moaning of the boughs as they rub together;

Gentler rustle of the little leaves at my ear,
Far-off drowsy clanging of cow-bells,
Nearby twitter of two bird travellers, sleepily settling their plans for the summer,
Startling beat of the wings of a low-flying night-bird
That drives out of the darkness
Into the darkness again,
Distant night-noises of the village almost asleep,
Nearer monotonous purr of the brooklet that loafs
away to the river,
Rhythmical rise and fall of my own breath
As I wait — and listen.

Night after night —
Ever the leaves are more stalwart,
The buds swell and tremble, eager to spring forth,
A subtle hint of fragrance drifts from the hillside;
I am sure that the time is at hand —
And still the blossoms do not come.

Now this night too is almost gone;
The faint glow of dawn stains the east,
Yet still I lie, waiting and listening.

At last near me a low crackle —
So soft, I am sure my ears deceive me;
I bend nearer;
Again the rustle as the sheath-case is shoved open,
The thin sound as the petals expand, each to its place.
Ah, a violet blossom, my heart tells me!
I lean to it,
Drinking in its hidden freshness.

Now on all sides countless low-voiced crackles:
The violets, the great-faced woodland blossoms, are
 being born!
They turn their pale faces to the tender spring
 stars,
Sloping from overhead to the dull west;
I cannot pause;
From one to another I go,
Feeling the delicate flower faces with greedy fingers
 in the grayness;
I drink with gasps of delight the swelling fragrance,
Bathing my hot cheeks in the twice-dewed faces of
 the violets,
Dewed by the stress of their unfolding, and by the
 dawn mists, —
And now, as the east brightens, I see the petals
 slipped from the sky,
Richly inlaying in blue the brown pine-needed
 hillside.

Now, eloquent thru me,
The infant blossoms sing their glad song of birth
To the dawn that called them forth;
To the plants that lifted them,
With leaves of dancing green
And pale root-threads below,
Older sterile brothers and sisters of the blossoms,
Lungs to rob the burdened breeze, mouths to feed
 from the brook and the pantried hill;
To the mother plants that once dotted the hillside,
Sending forth their fragrant summons
To butterfly and honey-bee,

And that cuddled the browning seeds till they were
ripe for the scattering;
To the autumn winds that whirled open the pods,
And flung broadcast the toughened seeds;
To the covering drift of the winter
That shaped a nest for their growing;
To the great sun-mother that called them forth this
springtide
To arise and blossom.

O great sun-mother,
Can you look back to a far earlier day,
As you went whirling on thru the startled darkness?
Circling around you wheeled your older children,
But the little earth was yet in your glowing womb,
Yet a part of your flaming spiral
That spun from your heart's hot centre out
As far as we stray today;
Mother with your unborn burden of fire, you
whirled on your way.

Now, as you grew chill and small,
Came the time for parting;
Aching and throbbing you pushed the child from
you,
And the wondering stars turned away for a moment.
How you yearned for your earth-baby, as it slipped
from you!
It spun forth, rounding to a flaming globe,
With flashing streamers of fire,
Great arms that stretched toward you, seeking
you;

And you in turn strained toward her
Close, close, until you had almost clasped her;
And now the flaming arms were wrenched away,
The cord was cut, the birth-pangs were ended,
A new world was born.

Later came younger brothers and sisters,
As you grew more chill and small;
And each world-baby flamed and cooled,
Grew from a fiery cloud to a gray shell with a
golden heart, —
Slowly a mist, and a sea;
And out of the cooling sea the cells,
And plants, and movers in land and sea and air;
At last eyes, that saw you as you could not see
them, nor yourself,
While still, O sun, you flame as before the world-
birth.

Do you long for your son and daughter worlds,
mother?
Slower and slower their turning,
Colder and colder they grow as time stumbles
on;
At length I see cold balls turning unchanging faces
to you,
Eyes closed in the icy sleep of death.
Closer and closer they near your twilight mass,
And then to your mother heart with a leap they
come;

A fiery flare of welcome for a moment,
Then still more shadowy you grow toward a longer
 night,
Until you return to your mother, great sun,
And she to her mother, and so unending;
Until anew you begin to whirl, a laughing cloud of
 fire.

Yet still your arms of light reach to the far outposts
 of your circling children,
And dimming into the void beyond;
Today your warmth stirs life on countless worlds,
Your glow calling forth, on this hillside,
The skyblue violets of Spring.

I am no stranger to you, sun-mother,
But a daughter, and sister to these blossoms;
In me the dust and the flame are joined,
In me the delicate colors, the swelling fragrance,
The untouched seeds for many blossoms to be,
The laughing sons and daughters of earth.
My spring-stars are barely risen, my day trembles
 at the dawn,
But your beating flame of love will bring the
 noon;
I your daughter, with eyes that see, and a soul that
 knows,
Will bring forth shining ones, flaming men and
 women
To shed your light abroad.

O violets, let me return to you;
Let me cool my hot cheeks in your thrice-dewed
 faces,
Dewed by the stress of your unfolding, and by the
 dawn mists,
And by the rain from my joy-filled eyes,
As the tender shine of the spring stars dies in the
 west,
And the young day is upon me.

COMRADES

II. *COMRADES*

DAWN

I. *BEGINNING*

SONGS for you, O my comrade,
That rise to my lips when the heart sings,
And tell of its wistful and joy-shaken melodies;
Songs of our comradeship full and entire,
Of the hours we have lived together, or apart,
 thinking of one another;
Of the love deep and tender, the glowing thoughts
 and breathless whispers,
Timid caresses, and open, triumphant embraces;
The full peace of your presence and my presence
 together;
And, clearer seen and abiding, visions of endless
 hours together, —
For you these songs, O my comrade.

II. *BEFORE THE FIRE*

A WARM log fire in a wide-squared grate,
The glowing embers radiating heat and light
Into all the corners of the tongueless room,
And you and I, forms interwreathed, O my beloved,
Silently loafing on the floor before it. . . .

Poor fire! If you could think,
You would think you were warm,
You would be proud of your cheery blaze;
But unseen of you, and seen only of two,
As they loaf silently before you,
In this same tongueless room, which cannot tell
all it holds or knows,
And many sweet and dear things,
There burns a glow, deeper and stronger than you
will ever know,
There is a cheerier interflow of warmth than yours,
There is a flame that will light this and countless
other rooms,
The glow in my heart for my comrade, and in her
heart for me.

III. *AS DUSK MELTS TO NIGHT*

THE soft dusk melting into night,
Within, the room filled with a trembling quiet
darkness,
Without, the black roofs edging close, the deserted
street below,
The gay golden lights not far distant,
The few window-lit skyscrapers pushing defiant
fingers into the deep sky,
The splendid fire of the stars,
Exulting Orion, and the great eye Aldebaran be-
neath the shimmering sisters, shining clearly
for us,
The reassuring farness of the night; —

And between me and the window,
Her vaguely tumbled hair and clear profile softened
in the low light,
(One or two of those nervy stars laughing lightly
thru the tumbled wisps of her hair),
Her still tall form, reaching from the gray invis-
ibility beneath the window up to those far stars,
Gazing without, yet all the time keenly alive to me,
As I stood hesitant, close to her; —

And then she turned, and her lips formed one
breathed broken word,
And, even as the dusk melts to night,
She melted into my havening arms.

IV. *TOGETHER*

THE wild whip of the morning winds,
The keen thrill as they push turbulently upon us,
Ruffling the chill harbor water sloshing right at
our dangling feet,
And unruffling ever, a smoothing flow of grayness
That blends into the gray morning sky,
The silent city asleep at our back, joyless and
unalive,
The rough beams we sat on, the squat beam-post
you leaned against,
The insistent wind tugging at our tight-buttoned
great-coats,
The chill air upon my left cheek and your right cheek,
The thrill of your warm fingers in mine,
Your face turned bravely out to the ruffled sea,
And mine towards yours;
The thrill of our bodies close-huddled on the
beams, . . .
And then one calm certain kiss,
Seal of a comradeship to be perfect and life-long;
And, turning again to the wintry sea,
Summer and glowing life in our hearts,
Unafraid we faced the keening winds and the
opening sea,
And the whole gray sea-way of life; —
And it shone gay and blossomy now,
For we faced it together.

V. DAWNS

AS Brooklyn Bridge woke to the gray dawn-
light,
As its slender arch and spidery filaments of inter-
woven wires grew clearer and sharper,
Silhouetted against the first faint smile of the sober
eastern sky;
As the early tug slid up the resisting river,
Trailing behind a filmy scarf of foam;
As the dawn light glowed, and the little lights of
the still city paled,
It was good of the dawn to display her dear delights
to us,
It was a lovely round-flung landscape,
Dappled with shadowy wharves and long curving
bridges,
And a jagged sky-line that buttressed the wakening
gray; —
But what difference did it make to us, my com-
rade?
For to us, as we sat hand in hand, and heart in
heart,
On the elsewise chill and cheerless iron bench on
the bridge,
Or walked, arm lovingly twined in loving arm,
Along its echoing gray distance, —
(O, those first loving echoes at dawn
That shivered the crystal-gray silence,

And trembled along up the spidery filament wires
into Heaven!) —

To us, O my comrade,

It was already dawn, and day, and a clear-shining
sun.

VI. UNFETTERED

NOT in pinched houses or in stuffy rooms,
Whose walls and ceilings fether the body and
soul,

Be our love told, O my comrade, —

But in our open home, with the sky above:

On some deserted silent street at night, whose
hollowness re-echoes our faint breath, as we sit
watching the reassuring stars;

Down by the slapping waves, eager little lovers
trying to lisp us their story of joy and unity,

Or turbulent enemies, whose hissed menace we can
laugh at, for we have one another;

Poised high on some craggy mountain-side,

Hugged within the huge knees of the tree-giants
above us,

Who wear the star-twinklers as tinselled ornaments
in their tousled black-green hair;

Idling in some lush meadow, brimful of spring and
the leaping green,

Tenderly starred with white water-violets;

Or striding, shoulder to shoulder and soul to soul,

Down the noisy street, or the muffling sandy road,

Or the crackling pathlessness of the fragrant
woods; —

In this first wholesome home of all of us,

With the loving stir of the breeze,

And the free air filling our nostrils,

There let our love be told.

VII. *FINALLY*

NOW for a little I have ceased singing;
Now I bring these songs to you,
That you may lay them next to your heart.

And now lay me next to your heart, O my comrade,
For I am dearer to you than any song,
And you are dearer to me than all songs.

SUNRISE

I. *APART FROM YOU*

APART from you — scarce a room apart, —
Yet this slight parting fills me with a vague
disquietude. . . .

Still to my eyes you are present, you and your
lovable beauty,

Still to my ears the cool tinkle of your voice,
With its hidden shy promise;

Yet my shoulder does not touch yours,

Nor do I thrill to the near trembling of your vagrant
hair;

Nor can my hand reach yours, tho I stretch it out
ever so far.

It is not well always to have the sunshine,

Nor always the cool soothe of the night hours,

Nor the wistful freshness of the spring blossoms,

Nor the vigorous shove of the winter winds. . . .

Sometimes the unwelcome night, or the garish day,
Or the arid winter, or the sultry summer discom-
fort. . . .

But O, when I come back to the dawn, or the stars,
or the spring,

Or to you, — or to you!

II. *BLENDED*

YOU have called me, and I come, —
Pushing the hands of the clock vigorously
backward,
Shoving aside distances and obstacles,
Passing serenely thru the trees of the groves and parks,
Brushing aside their interlocking branches with ease,
Tossing aside the tall buildings barring my passage,
Shouldering away the houses, blocks, moments,
clustering crowds,
Drawn resistlessly by your call, O my beloved.

And now I have come —
Smother me to your bosom,
Tangle my hair in your sensitive tresses, lock your
fingers in mine,
Kiss to a glow again my brows, and my chill cheeks,
My parched lips, and my quivering eyelids. . . .

And, even as our souls soar upward together,
welded and blended in one,
So do our bodies blend together;

Until, when you breathe a breath deeper than ever
before, or when I breathe as deeply,
Or when your heart or my heart beats tensely aloud,
We cannot, either of us, tell if it is you or I who
breathe,
Or your heart or mine that beats so triumphantly.

III. *THIRSTY*

MY lips are dry and withered, like petals of
dead roses;

My lips are sere and thirsty, for an hour away
from yours;

My lips are parched and wilted, — kiss them back
into bloom!

My heart is hushed and yearning, like a violin
unplayed;

My heart is tense and aching, for an hour away from
yours;

My heart is chill and hungry, — kiss it back into
flame!

INTERLUDE

I. *ICE-LOCKED*

YOUR heart is an ice-locked river,
The patient work of a plodding autumn and
winter,
Vast interfrozen blocks of ice, towering bleakly into
the lean sky,
Your depths below asleep in icy forgetfulness.

The gaunt and far-off winter sun did his best,
He stretched out his withered arms of thin light,
trying to embrace you,
He could hardly touch the hem of your garment,
Too far away from him your proud and frozen
soul. . . .
Was I that sun?

Ah, but not always will it be the winter sun who
woos you;
Another lover will come, unperceived he will push
aside the withered dotard and leap into his
place,
The spirit of youth, spring, pulsing with love,
Flaming and radiant in his fiery loveliness.

And do you think you can say him nay,
Or coyly withhold, or proudly retreat?

Nay, he will fling his flaming arms around you,
He will lift you to him for a burning, breathless kiss;
And lo, with the rush as of a million waters you
 will flood forth,
Shouting aloud your melody of pouring beauty.

II. *THE WITHHOLDER*

YOU have given me back my faith in woman-kind.

I had thought them all, married and single, alike, —
Melting like butter at the first feeble heat,
And spilling out, sticky and unpleasant, in all
directions;
But I find you like the great women I had dreamed
of.

Ah, you are wiser than I —
You are full enough of love, a captive ocean of it
within you;
But you will not let it leak out, in sport and
wantoning,
Upon every empty seeker;
You will be proud mistress of yourself until your
lover comes,
One perfect in your eyes,
One fit to be the mate of your radiant loveliness;
And then you will be yourself in love, as in all of
life,
Always lovely, always chaste.

For chastity is not life-long abstinence,
Not damming up the flood of sex until the waters
have become corrupt and stagnant,
Poisoning the splendid health of their source;

Chastity is not a life twisted queerly by the unused
sex-flood,
It is not a woman or man diseased with ingrowing
sex.

Chastity is something positive, something vigorous
and full of struggle;
It is selection,
The aggressive defense from the waster,
The free giving and taking the love-life together
with your chosen mate, in awe and joyfulness,
A part of the clear life-stream
That washes the curved shores of this tiny dark star.

Yes, I find you like the great women I had dreamed
of,
Chaste, proud, sure of your pent-up loveliness;
And I shall publish your virtues abroad,
For womankind needs more of you.

III. *ROSY MAGIC*

WHAT fools you women make of men!
Or did the Creator make them fools in the
first place,
And is it your part merely to bring it out?

I sat beside you, blue and dispirited,
Deaf to the joy and music around me,
Wondering sadly what would be the pleasantest
way to die,
How it would feel to tumble over the balcony to
death;
And what difference did it make how it felt; I did
not care;
Pensively sure that no one would miss me, shelved
in the gloomy tomb;
Tired of the cheap futility of life,
And the decrepit solar system limping along thru
the aging sky;
There was no purpose in anything,
And what a pity things had been made, in some
absent-minded moment of God's, —

When you turned to me,
Your face lit with a smile for me,
Laying your finger lightly on mine for a moment,
placing your arm in mine;
And presto! Everything was changed completely!

The music was lovely, the fat old tenor youthful
and heroic,
The world a spring-rose, the universe a gay
adventure;
And I felt so sure of myself and my overbrimming
power
That I itched to go out and wrestle with the sun
himself,
And throw him out of Heaven, and wheel forward
in his great place,
Radiating a stronger glow than he could flame,
Into the uttermost ends of the universe!

IV. *FOR THE MOMENT*

HAVE I been fooled in you all the time?
Are your beauty and sweetness merely what I
want to find in you?
Is your radiant loveliness that I enjoy singing
Merely wished on you by me, because I am hungry
for it?

Sometimes I think I am fooled, —
Sometimes I think you are merely a crude flirt,
Coyly aloof, because you like the game yourself;
Dangling me, the better to attract other flies
To your sticky surface of sweetness;
Even in your youth trembling on the narrow edge
of life,
Sure to tumble in, and be pulled out, mired and
foul-smelling.

Be it so —
For the moment you are sweet to me,
For the moment love and the fluttering spring shine
in you,
For the moment I see you as loveliness itself, —
And I will love you, and sing you, while the moment
lasts.

V. SLEEPLESSNESS

LAST night I awoke, —
It was some late hour, for the vast noises of
the city were muffled and vague;
The morning mists crept up, and clung wanly at
my window.

I lay, restless and tossing,
Thinking of you;
So clearly my hungry ears heard you call me,
That I was sure you stood right by my couch;
I knew that when once I turned from the wall,
You would be standing there, smiling and marvelous;
I felt your breath set the air of the room trembling, —
I turned to you,
And only the thin night was with me.

And then I was sure you stood just without the
door,
Waiting, tremulous and fearful, for me;
Three times I tried to crowd the fancy away, and
could not;
I moved to the door, and paused, listening.
Was that your breathing coming softly from just
without?
I whispered your name, — just once, — I heard
you answer me!
But I knew all the time that you could not be
there.

I smiled away a catch in my throat,
And then tremblingly slipped the bolt,
And peered out for your dear shape. . . .
Only the breathing blackness of the empty halls
 leered back at me.

I passed back to the window, with the wan mists
 clinging to it,
And looked without, and thought and thought. . . .
Why do you torture me?
Why will you not stay out of my thoughts, and
 let me sleep?
For I must go fresh to work at eight in the morning.

VI. *THE REAL THING*

YOUR smile is like the far-off echo of falling
waters,
Lingering and musical;
Your laugh comes back to me, like the gentle clang-
ing of bells
Heard over a flower-sweet meadow.

But I do not want any gentle clangings or far-off
echoes, —
I want you —
You and your vigorous sweetness,
The yielding, struggling clasp of you,
The fainting joy of your kiss.

VII. *THE YARD-STICK*

I DO not know the taste of your lips,
I have not drowned myself in the fragrance of
your night-tresses,
My arms and my aching breast have not felt the
melting sweetness of your embrace;
In your own good time you will rain your lips and
your love on your chosen mate.

It is well —

I do not complain that it is not love-pouring
summer,
When timid Spring is walking softly, hand in hand
with me.

But this I have, and this you cannot keep from
me, —

One perfect remembrance of your face,
The chase of shine and shade across it,
The rose-glow of your cheeks and your full lips,
The conquering certainty of your clear brown eyes.

This I shall keep,

Using it as a yard-stick to measure all other beauty
by, —

Until at length I have outgrown it.

MORNING

I. *THE LINK*

WHEN the storm-clouds piled between us,
In the dark and scattering hour
When we struggled for a rebirth of our souls,
And of our love for one another,
One thing held me to you.

It was not the expanding structures of love
That we had builded together;
It was not vows,
Nor inner promise of eternal fealty,
Nor our common purpose in life,
Nor the clenching grasp of passion; —

It was the battered little coffee-pot
That we had bought together for five cents
From a ghetto push-cart
That would not let me go.

II. *THE CHAINS OF LOVE*

THE bustling noons are so calm, when we are
together,
The out-of-doors so quickening when we laugh back
to it,
The meal-times yield such full communion,
The still nights are so brimmed with a breathless
and mounting ecstasy,
The placid dawn-hours so restful and lingering-
sweet,
That soon we have faded out of other life,
We have fled from the vivid touch of the world and
its people,
We have lost even ourselves, to find one another.

III. *PRELUDE*

NOW Night edges close around us,
Pouring his flood of black silence
Out of the star-dotted jar of heaven.

With gay "Good nights" the friends depart,
And all the bars that hold us one from the other
Dissolve and vanish.

I lie, wide-eyed, on the couch,
While I hear you moving around in the next room
for a few slow minutes;
And the air grows sweet with the scent of the
lighted joss on the mantel,
And the subtle promise of hastening raptures.

You stand before the mirror, braiding your hair;
It spills, a brown-gold flood, over your gay kimono
With its radiant pink chrysanthemums rampant
On a jet-blue sky of silk.

At last you turn to me, your smile enveloping
mine. . . .
You slowly put out the light,
And the love-knitting night floods all of the room,
As I lie aching for the touch of you.

The one red spark of the joss-taper glows tenderly
from the mantel,
One star, alone in a heaven so near that I can touch
it.

And now, out of the dear darkness,
Your fingers find mine.

IV. *THE SEA-SEEKER*

AS the vast river, shouldering past its grasping
banks,
The long covetous arms of the land, that stretch to
restrain it,
Desires and aches for the summoning body of the
sea,
Speeds toward the swelling breasts of the sea,
nipped with foam,
And having found her, and greatly leapt upon her,
Pours his full self and soul into her,
Mingling himself with her irresistible and welcoming
flow of love,
So I speed all unheeding thru the hindering hours of
the day, —
Distracting business and life, the thin and misty
faces I meet,
Aching for your summoning soul and body;
And having found you, and greatly woven myself
into your embrace,
Pour my full soul and self into you.

V. *RAINFALL*

THE comely earth lay parched and thirsty,
Aching for the rain.

Vast winds came roaring from the four corners of
the sky,
Great clouds pulsed and banded above her,
Growing ever mightier and more massive,
Full to bursting with their freighting of unpoured
balm.

Then the skies opened, and the surging rain drove
downward,
And the earth lay, drenched and joyous, in the full
flood.

The spent clouds grew thin and pale,
The sun shone timidly, then with a great light,
The earth smiled joyfully into the smiling face of
the sky. . . .

You lay so smiling and still, love,
As I smiled back at you!

VI. *HUGGING THE CHAINS*

LONG days of love, slow years of love,
Have welded ever more firmly and unbreakably
The chains that bind us, each to the other,
And each to our joint life.
Dear mutual memories forge strong links;
Our home together, this holiday's gifts,
The piano won at last;
All of these tighten the bonds;
And it is well that it is so.

Discard the links? Spurn the chains?
Ah, but the climbers of steep peaks know well
That only these tough, fettering links,
Hold them from jagged death in the depths be-
low. . . .

Forge well the chains!

When we have reached the summits,
Then it will be time to slip them to the ground,
Standing unbound, hand in hand, in the lone high
places,
Securely overlooking the long rough way,
Seeing, above the clouds, the undimmed stars.

NEW ROADS

III. *NEW ROADS*

NEW ROADS

EVERY road was a new road once,
And before that a footpath
Won out of the wilderness.

The roads that were glad and new in the past
Once led thru live meadows and up tantalizing
steps;
They were broad enough then.
And now the meadows are trampled by the endless
pat-pat of feet
Into dead stubble and tear-soaked marsh,
And the climbed steps show themselves cowering
foothills,
And the tides of smoke shut out the vaster steps
above,
And the sun and the stars,
And the roads are all too narrow.

I shall not go down the old roads;
I shall follow the beckoning footpaths of dead
leaders,
Making broad roads of them;
I shall make one footpath myself.

SHOP-TALK

AT last I have your instructions straight,
Fearless American people!
I am to sing life itself, in its driving vastness, —
I am to be bold and radical, you say, —
Ever careful not to offend or shock the conservative.

I am to soft-pedal all this stuff about sex;
The matings of birds I can discreetly allude to,
The vast oak-tree flinging his pollen upon the wind,
naked and unembarrassed;
But I am to take care not to mention the human
mating.

I am never to criticize the home,
Nor urge greater freedom in the relations of men
and women —
That would attack one of the bulwarks of our
civilization.

I must be patriotic,
Glorifying "Old Glory,"
Applauding "our boys in blue" as they shoot down
foreign agitators and strikers.
Hurrah for the flag! Cheers for Law and Order!

Of course I must never encourage revolution,
Never praise the red flag of brotherhood, or the
black rag of anarchy,
Or any other un-American abomination.

I am to venerate the Courts, and the drooling
judges,
Teach woman to stay at home, and obey her lord,
Preach to the workers the dignity of labor — ~~for~~
~~them~~;
And, every ten years, manfully make some minor
reform
A vivid and rousing battle-cry.

Thus, fearless American people,
Will you achieve “social justice,”
And civilization will be saved. . . .

You have made a mistake, American people;
You do not need a man to sing to you, but a
parrot;
You are looking for a jelly-fish, a genteel puppet, —
One who knows his place, and will keep it.

Well, I know my place, and I will keep it —
Not that fenced barrenness where you would have
me remain,
But the adventuring earth, and the star-tidal seas
it swims thru.
Everything in them is mine, to sing clearly and
truly.

This I shall do,
Sure that the singing is good, because it pleases me.

TO ANY REVOLUTIONIST

I

ON to the combat — I am sick of this itching
idleness,
My soul hungers for the musical crash of the fray;
I long to rub the rust from my unused weapons,
And forth to my eager place,
Striking a swinging blow for the great cause.

They say, "It is peace,"
And with hands folded and eye-balls meekly rolling
up thank God for that lie:
But we — we know that it is not peace.

Nevermore while injustice gorges on the blood of
the people,
Nevermore while ignorance and blindness are their
lot,
Nevermore while the right to live and to speak are
lip-lies, and really exiled,
Nevermore will there be peace — but war, bitter
and unending;
And I long to shake off this rusting inaction,
And plunge again into the forefronts of contests.

II

Ho, desperate striver in the great cause,
Fierce contender for the shining goal,
Struggle whole-heartedly and unceasingly, keep the
 banner streaming high.

But make no mistake —
This very goal will mean nothing to you, when you
 have reached it;
Nothing to you, nor to humanity.
It is only the striving that counts,
Only the struggle that toughens the sinews of body
 and soul,
Only thus that the world whirls upward.

So strip the ornaments from your neck, and on to
 the fight,
Steadily aim for the gleaming goal;
And when you have reached it, and hold in your
 hand the prize,
Toss it lightly aside, a bauble, a plaything for
 children,
And on to the next race, the new-opening struggle.

A PSALM NOT OF DAVID

THE Lord is our Shepherd, and we are the sheep
of His pasture.

He gives us His tender care, and our needful food
and drink,

And at the appointed time delivers us all to the
shearer,

Or to the butcher, to be slaughtered, — for that
is what sheep are for.

Never the shepherd watches the sheep for their
good,

Never he lets them live out their lives in joy and in
triumph;

Always the shepherd uses the sheep for his plea-
sure,

Caring naught for their welfare save as it hurts him
or helps him.

The Lord is our Shepherd.

If we are sheep, we will praise our Shepherd,

We will meekly bow to His will, accept His food
and His drink,

And at the appointed time trot sheepishly to the
shearing or butchering.

If we are men, we will snatch His crook from the
Shepherd's hands,

And break it over His fleeing shoulders, and go on
our way rejoicing.

THE GOLDEN MIRACLE

DO ye ask for a sign, O ye of little faith?
Do ye doubt and stand slant-eyed
When bread and wine become the blessed body and
blood
Of dear Lord Jesus Christ?

Do ye summon your Baals, Science and the Modern
Spirit,
To bear witness for you?

Truly, ye are a perverse and balky generation!
For every day ye see a greater miracle,
A more wonderful transformation, never resting,
belting the world;
The lift and glow of youth, the vigor of maturity,
the trembling haste of age, become gold;
The splashed blood of workers on the spread rails
and the keen-edged machine-blades,
The fragrant smell of woman-flesh on the altars of
lust,
The toiling children, grayer than gray age,
Turned into gold;
The packed slums and lean farm-houses, the loath-
some food, the water swarming with death,
Aye, and the souls, the light, of humankind, all
become gold —
Dumb gold, that can hardly tell its breathing origin.

I am ashamed of my feeble God and his well-meaning
son,
And their elementary miracles!
Ye scoffers and doubters, scoff and doubt no more!
Look upon this greater miracle, and worship!

EARTH-MOTHER

I

SAY, did God light that great red sun he hated so?
Did His love-pouring lips blow forth the fiery
breath
That scorched the city's endless pavements,
That shrivelled the tramper's body and soul?

All day he walked from hot to hotter streets, foot-
weary, foot-dead,
In search of the chance to use his weakening body,
All day for work, for food.

"Full up!" they said,
And as the door slammed on him,
He caught but a glimpse in the dusk within
Of bending forms and pallid faces,
Lit with a piteous joy that they, the favored slaves,
Could toil to a slow death for a little food.

II

Across one hot street, where the breeze stirred not,
And the sullen heat lay lazy-still,
He saw the oily swell of the sea;
It must be cool below that dead bosom!
But it was not cool above;
One finger-tip in the tepid saltness told him that;

So he turned his aching feet and heart from its hot
swell
And crept on.

III

He passed with slower steps thru the dingy tene-
ments,
Stewing in hot misery;
While the red sun died in a welter of blood in the
west,
And the red stars looked wonderingly down from afar,
But dared not come nearer, to see his drawn face
and tired form,
Yet they grew red and redder as they jeered at him
in their mirth, —
And he fled on.

IV

He knew not when or how, but the way was cool
underfoot,
And the throbbing pavement gone, and the restful
dust beneath,
On and on, till the shadows grew tall from the
trees beside,
And their breath so cool and sweet, and their sigh
so low,
As a mother that croons to a babe half-asleep at her
breast;
And the red stars talked to each other now, and
plagued him not;
And ever the shadows of trees leaned down to him,
And bent overhead and beside as if shielding his way.

At last, as the full moon rose,
There was no more road, but a tiny ribboned path
White ahead like a silver cord flung over the hill,
And now underfoot the grass, and the blur of pale
 flowers,
And now even this path dissolved.

And the cool woods
Stroked his tired soul with their gentle fingers;
And a friendly stream rose to his lips and thrilled him,
And there, on a bed of leaves, he stumbled and slept
Till the moon and the stars faded,
And the sun shone golden and distant and cool,
And he woke on the breast of the mothering earth.

v

Far below, far away,
Dimmed by the dust of its own writhings,
The city lay. . . .
But it scorched him no more; it shone with the
 glow of the sun.

His eyes caught a glimpse of the city to be,
As friendly and cool as the mothering earth,
When the world, pregnant with joy, would deliver
 her babe,
And the small human life would be glad and stately,
And woman and man, of a height and a beauty,
 would walk thru life side by side,
And a child's life would grow like a flower and not
 like a weed.

And now, heart made bold by the vision,
He passed from the mothering woods,
To live in the city that was, with its heat and its
 pain,
To make it the city to be of beauty and joy.

THE NIGHT-SHIFT

(The Builders of the Subway)

SILENTLY, secretly,
While you are asleep, New York,
While your blank walls look impassively down,
A silent army gnaws its way beneath you.

There was a brain that dreamed of pulsing steel
rails under you,
Of hurtling cars shuttling their breathing cargoes
From your packed Bronx to your sea-lapped
Battery;
And a brain that schemed each tie and rivet of the
dream.
The dreamer sees other visions now,
The schemer sleeps soundly,
But the dream lashes on this silent army.

No vision lights their way,
Lightening their toil.
Gray in the shrouding river-mists,
Beneath the tiny haloes
Of sickly yellow lights
They burrow on. . . .
Their backs straighten and stoop, straighten and
stoop, unendingly;
The keen pick-axes pierce silently the gray earth;
The earth-wall loosens and crumbles before them;

Swiftly, with straining backs, they shovel it into the
waiting cars;

The cars are emptied — they gape again to be
filled. . . .

Here is no joy of the worker eager to do his work,
Here is no craftsman's pride, no artist's care. . . .

Gnawing on thru the night and the silence,
Sullen and sombre, joyless and dreamless,

They are lashed to their tasks

By the searing whip of that distant dream.

They are gnawing their way beneath you, dumb
city,

Thru the graves of countless buried New Yorks. . . .

Here are skeletons of old houses,

Sunken hand-beams, lovingly laid under friendly and
forgotten suns;

Sealed fire-places, ashy and chill;

Filthy old cellars; wooden drain-pipes; —

A cemetery of dead days.

Carelessly these bones are bared to the dark of night,

Carelessly they are carted away. . . .

The silent army gnaws on.

A voice from far away:

“Work while there is yet light,

For the night cometh, when no man can work.”

Here, in the night,

The work goes on.

The lone policeman idles by;

A car drones past;

The belated woman hurries on,
Her fearful face shawled even from the night;
Ragged Coat hangs for a long time watching the
workers,
Marvelling at their dead eagerness, their lashed
energy,
Envyng their gray lot;
Then he stumbles on,
And the still shroud of night draws closer.

Now there is a sharp clatter,
A turbulent shower of sounds;
One pitiful mule,
The only animal with spirit enough to rebel,
Tears at his traces, backs wildly into the cart,
Revolts passionately from his treadmill drudg-
ery. . . .
The men work, unconcerned. . . .
Bleeding, with raw sides,
He is lashed back to work.

The silent army gnaws on.

A BREATH OF LIFE

YES, he'll enlist — he'll leap at the chance!

If you think eleven servile hours a day, six days a
week,
A slatternly wife, a tableful of children all mouths,
A sodden Sunday, and then the long round again,
Can bind him to sanity and peace —
You do not know your brother —
You do not know yourself!

Better the close-locked marching feet,
The music like great laughter, the rough comrade-
ships —
War is a picnic, a vast game of chance;
You may win, — or earn a quick and bursting death,
Cancelling all these unpaid duty-debts at home.

Then — on to the picnic!
Out of the foul-aired routine!
A breath of life, tho death be the price!

TWO MOTHERS

I

I KNEW two young mothers.

They were wed at the same hour in the same
city; —

They were of an age, equally good to look upon,
Equally fit for bearing strong children.

But one was wed in a white-washed shack of a
church

Among the clustering huts of a mining camp on the
city's rim;

A miner's daughter, marrying a miner;

Schooled since her hasty youth in the textile
factory,

Already seared by the weary life of the worker.

The other was wed in a fragrant bower

In a brown-stone church in the city's heart,

With the rustle of silk, and the swelling peal of the
organ;

Taught in the choicest schools of the land, full of
the world's cherished knowledge,

Serenely eager to play her part in the joyful game
of living.

To each of these young wives, on the self-same day,
A son was born.

II

Life was not easy for the miner's wife.
Her task of keeping clean their hut was a dreary
one —
Their white-washed hut, decked with a noisy print,
"God Bless Our Home,"
And some newspaper faces smudged on the wall by
previous tenants.
Her daily hours when the house was cleaned were
dreary —
Naught to be done save to ramble thru the ram-
shackle neighborhood,
Thru alleys littered with twisted cans and jagged
bottle-ends,
Foul with decaying garbage and the smell of moist
ashes,
To other dreary houses, leaning over sagging front
gates,
Where other hopeless women cleaned up, and then
did nothing
But talk upon subjects as dreary as themselves.

And ever within her the little life was growing,
Shifting form after form, pushing thru the whole
chain of growth of the race,
And echoing in itself all that the mother passed
thru. . . .

He was kind to her after his rough fashion,
This miner-husband;

When he left her in the moist morning,
Ore-stained all over save his face and hands;
When he came back to her, face and hands too kin
to the ore,
After the sun had slumped away in the brick-red
west,
The lamp on his cap flickering as he stumbled,
Tired, worn to a frazzle in body and soul.

He drank too much at pay-days;
This too the young wife stood,
And the tipsy oaths, the mean concerns of the
miners and their wives;
For she was of them, was them.

And now a change for the worse, —
A strike, for some small share of the wealth they
wrung from the mines,
Dripping red with their life;
This wealth flung away so gaily
By the good men and women who owned them.
In the front rank of the strikers was the husband;
He picketed from morning till night,
He warned the scabs of their treason to labor.

Now came the soldiers, marching in four,
Brown-clad, hard-faced, eager scum of the earth,
Each soldier with gun on shoulder,
Each gun womb-stored with a bullet, a steel-nosed,
nuzzling bullet,
Each bullet a gift of the masters to the crimson
hearts of the workers.

Trudge, trudge, trudge, — grim and deadly they
look,
Marching, with earth-shaking step, thruout the
mining region,
Waiting, day after day, for a word — a certain
word —
At last it comes,
As they stand lined before a lowering surge of
miners;
The captain barks forth one little word, “Fire!”
Then the rattling volley, the staggering ranks of
strikers,
The falling forms, blood spurting from mid-temples,
Spreading a darker blot on the ore-stained breasts
of the miners, —
Satisfied grins on the soldiers’ faces, licking their
tongues with the blood-lust,
One young recruit fainting with horror at the blood,
The click as the guns are reloaded, and aimed
again, —
O God!
And these soldiers are your brothers;
They are your brothers who have murdered you.
Trudge, trudge, trudge, your brothers are marching
to murder you;
Trudge, trudge, trudge, your brothers are marching
over your graves.

Law and the courts were on the side of the owners,
(On which side right and justice, O my brothers?)
The strikers were driven from even the ramshackle
roofs over their heads, —

(The son of man has no place whereon to lay his
head.)

The food for the workers was scanty, all went
hungry, —

(Give us this day our daily bread) —

The young wife was driven from her hovel, with
her man and her unborn babe,

With oaths and foul curses from the soldiers.

On a hill nearby, tents stumbled up,

And a tiny store for the hungry children of labor.

The unresting pickets moved from here,

They voiced their clamorous wrongs from here,

And here the bodies were laid out, and buried.

And one night, while a sallow moon turned sicker
at the sight,

Came in a galloping thunder the soldiers, the
soldiers —

A scream in the night, "Wake! They are upon
you!"

They ringed the tent-town, they cut down the
tents over the sleepers, —

And now the captives are herded, like other cattle,

And with them the miner's wife and her unborn
burden,

Into the city, into the jail.

Here she lay in a white-washed cell,

Brooding on the iron bars that held and held her
from the world,

Tho she shake them ever so hard, ever so hard, —

From the sun, and the morning and evening,

And the tent-covered hillside —
The tent-ropes are cut, the fires are gray,
The tents fallen to the hillside, a queer hush over the
tent-town now.

And here in this narrow cell, iron-barred,
Torn from her husband,
She mused unending bitter thoughts,
Until at length the time was come, and her son was
born, —
As long before a babe was born in a stable, and laid
in a manger, —
Born on a filthy mattress of straw, with lousy
blankets covering,
With the curious stares of the few who did not care,
and jeered,
Treated by the prison doctor, who was sure that the
world was too full of babies anyhow, —
So was this son born.

At last they were released,
Her infant son in arms and at breast,
And the miners — those of them who were left —
went back to their work,
Having won at dreadful cost no present gain,
Having sown the seeds for future struggles and
victories.

The boy grew to a man,
And all the ugliness, the ignorance, the filth,
The prison bars, the searing brands of oppression,
Were graven deep on his being, they moulded his
nature, —
This was the son of the miner's wife.

III

Life was easy for the other young wife.
She was deeply read in Nature's laws,
She knew the purpose of love, and the marvel of
birth,
She was clean in body and soul,
And how earnestly she sought to help the little
form grow most perfectly!

Sacredly she conceived the child,
Devotedly she planned for its welfare.
No dreary work was hers;
Others laid down their labor that she might shape
her son aright.

She walked from room to room of her spacious
mansion,
Looking at lovely paintings and statues;
She walked pleasantly thru gardens hedged with
staid green,
Lit with blossoms of the fragrant seasons;
And thru the peaceful, beautiful world out of doors;
And her soul walked unhedged fields of joy;
She sang — sang most of all,
That he might thrill with love of song.

She mused constantly how perfect she wished him
to be;
And her husband and family helped her;
They too worked not, the labor of others lightened
their load.

She placed at the foot of her bed a picture,
That she might see it last as she turned out the
light,
That it might greet her first when the morning
woke her;
A picture of the baby she wished her son to be,
Lovely, nobly formed, with a dimple on each cheek.
And she prayed a prayer over and over again:

“May he — my son to be — be even as you!
May he be beautiful, nobly formed,
Smiling, with a dimple in each cheek,
With a glorious body for the temple of his spirit.

“May he see beauty in all things,
And thrill with the rapture of song;
May he glean truth and wisdom
From the far shores of the universe.

“May he have a lofty spirit,
Gentle, mindful of others above himself;
May his whole self forever belong to humanity;
A free gift, O mankind, I pledge to you
In this son of mine.”

And at length, in a clean and beautiful room,
Surrounded by a loving husband and family,
At length the time was come, and her son was born.

The boy grew to a man,
And well was his mother's devotion repaid,
In form, soul, longings, even to the dimple on each
cheek;

And all the beauty, the comfort, the great-souled
prayers and wishes
Were graven deep on his being, they moulded his
nature.

In many things was the mother's heart made
glad,
In some few things not so;
She could not hear the voices that urged at his
ear,
Nor see the visions that lifted his soul step after
step;
Higher he climbed than she could follow,
As life climbs ever in the flowing generations.
This was this woman's son.

IV

Differing more and more the lives of the sons
grew,
One bound to lightless labor,
One bowed to by all the gift-bringers of earth;
One driven at last to crime and violence,
The other walking easily in gentler ways. . . .

When, O foolish ones, will you be wise?
When, O blind brothers, will you see?
When will you give to each mother the light, and
the fuel of life?
When will you lift this death-cloth of ignorance,
And let wide-flowing truth shine in,
To remanifest itself in higher men and women?

Come soon, O time;
Come soon, O fetterless kingdom to be, upon the
eager earth.

I am coming, answers the time;
My coming will not be long delayed;
When you least expect me I am with you, I am even
now about to leap out upon you.
Will you recognize me when you first see me?

JESTERS

I WILL be a jester, —
The spirit of mirth will wink at you from behind
my countenance,
Laughter will twinkle from my lips.

The solemn and serious affairs of life,
The depressing amusements, the endless routine of
trivialities,
These I will whiten with a pouring joy;
And the deeper currents of life,
Love, and the aching eruption of birth, and the
long calm of death,
The sweet intercourse of friendship, the hours spent
with myself,
These I will lift with a wider and deeper delight.

I will slough off the cramping skin of dignity,
I will shake myself free of the husks of decorum
and respectability,
I will walk, a laugher, a jester at the stupid wisdoms
of the world.

I have known one who was wise enough to laugh
at his own wisdom,
And my heart greeted him as a brother;
Come, be a jester and a laugher yourself.

TO A PHOTOGRAPH

YOU say this picture is a poor thing —
And you are right:
So is every photograph;
An unlucky moment's mood
Caught and frozen in two poor dimensions
On flat enduring matter;
And held there, to mock and laugh at us, —
To mock our selves, writhing, fleeing bodies and
spirits,
Seeking, all of a lifetime, to twist and dodge thru
other matter and spirit,
Until we come to cold nothingness.

The picture jeers at us:
"You are caught! Thus you were, thus you were!
This was your paltry look; this was your puny
form."

The self, already shaped anew by each moment's
moulding,
Startled at the picture, seeks to fly it,
Scurries the faster forward into the unknown.

A MEETING

I SAW him in the Subway, as we rode uptown;
He sprawled alone on the seat across,
His head bent curiously on his neck, as if about to
fall off.

His face it was that struck me most —
Eyes closed, beneath weak and matted eyebrows,
Skin blotched and spotted with brown patches,
A hollow horrible depression under each eye,
A week's foul growth of beard,
Scarcely veiling the red scar of a burn twisting his
lips;
And they hung open, showing two blackened teeth
within. . . .
And from his lips a thin stream of saliva trickled.

A rusted derby toppled above the face;
Below, his clothes were threadbare;
His trousers greasy and stained,
Gaping where one button had been neglected;
His shoes were water-soaked and wrinkled with age.

As the car stopped and started, he sagged and
lurched,
His head bent more ghastlily on his neck. . . .
He may have been only a little lower than the
angels;
He was much lower than the beasts.

And this is a man, as I;
Back of him, as back of me, the climbing genera-
tions of humanity,
For him, as for me, mankind has slaved and
struggled,
Clutched the dirt and conquered it, faced the stars
and unravelled their riddle;
Heroes, great loves, philosophies,
All poured forth for him as for me.

And this, O apostle of equality, you say is my
brother!
This, O walking delegate of brotherhood, is my
comrade and fellow!
I am to salute him, vermin and all, as such —
Together with him I am to build the future,
To found the kingdom of heaven upon earth. . . .

The car stopped at my station, and I got off,
Leaving him and his viewless face, his neck still
ghastlily bent,
Still dripping saliva. . . .

SINGLE

BY ones and ones we live —
Never by twos and twos.

What man can eat for me, or breathe for me?
What man can will for me? Or learn of life for me?
True, men are useful to me —
Even as I can use the fruits I munch,
The garments that warm me,
And the comely forests I am girdled with;
I can eat of men, and their knowledge and faith,
I can bathe my spirit in their radiance of love,
I can use them as bridges over ditch after ditch.

But there will come a time — and many and many
a time —
When the streams narrow, the currents deepen and
rush,
The banks tower and press upon me, —
The other craft must fall behind or speed before,
There is room for only one to pass;
And I, alone, on my own power depending,
Shall go, or fail to go, thru the narrow way.

Then grow strong, ship of my body and soul,
Grow firm and keen for the time —
Clear the decks of encumbrances, trim and oil the
lamps —
And when the time arrives
Sail, eager and steadfast, unshaken and shining
Into the wider seas.

COMRADESHIP

I WAS obsessed with the idea of comradeship;
I came roaring down from the highlands, to
plunge myself into the heart of the people;
A vision thrilled me, of a world of brothers, groping
after the same goal.
I spilled over with sentimentality and revolution,
I made myself a nuisance to respectability and
other idiocies.

I joined the comradeships;
I sat with machinists and miners and clerks,
Deft barbers, vision-led professional men, passion-
ate preachers of the Living God,
Crippled peddlers, silken women of leisure —
All lit with the same vision.

But my life could not be an endless propaganda;
Could these comrades go with me all the way?

When I talked cooperative commonwealth, they
were with me;
Then we palled on each other.
I did not enthuse over the ball-series, or the tedious
craft-disputes;
They tired of my plans and dreams — these were
bad for the job.

I do not look for comradeship that way now;
I will withdraw myself, and do my own work.
Some of my songs will fire them; some will be
poison and death.

I want the bigger comradeships, —
The brother who will climb the higher hill with me,
in the frosty dawn, while the world sleeps,
And look on stars and sleepers together;
Who will ride beside me in my dreams, and I in his;
Not a mere voting comrade.

Comradeship goes down to the souls of men —
It is not a mere hand-clasp and a glass of beer all
around,
It is a soul-clasp and a draught of foaming beakers
of the spirit —
And I am parched and thirsty for it.

THE SOCIAL REFORMER

A TALL youth growing up untouched by the
world
Felt the urge of life within him, the ache of his
sturdy muscles to be bent to their tasks,
The cry of his body for work for its flooding strength
and radiance.

So he went to the little people struggling near,
Each with his rag-tag bundled burden, picked up
in back-alleys and trash-piles,
Each whining and sweating about Providence, and
God's mysterious ways,
And laughing, he lifted them, burdens and all, to
his shoulders,
And strode on up the hill rejoicing.

But at length his mirth-tuned ear heard a squeak-
ing commotion:
"Let us down! Let us down! Let us carry our
own burdens!
We chose them! We love them! Do not rob us
of the joy of suffering under them!"
At first, he could not believe it;
Then with a laugh he shrugged them down,
Shaking his great shoulders free of the massive
load of the world's sins and follies and aches,

Leaving each to carry his own burden, or walk free
of it, as he chose, —
Carried his own burden for a while,
Then cast it down as a plank for better walking over
an oozy place,
And glistened on, tall and shining, across the fields
of men.

THE SOCIAL DOCTOR

PILLS for Sale!

Here's one with a cure-all for you, Society!
Remedies for all your ills!
Here's one who has carefully analyzed all your past,
And can predict your future from it, even to the
last wink of a fly!
It's all coming right! Take a pink pill, or a red one!
Pills for sale!
Remedies for everything!
Cooperative Commonwealths, Utopias, Syrup of
Feminism,
Scientific Bureaucracies, Democracies —
Take your choice — who'll buy? Who'll be the
first?

A question, learned doctor,
Do you understand yourself?
Do you know what you came for, and where you
are going?
Do you know the real meaning of your spouted
ache for brotherhood?
If you do not understand yourself, one atom of
society,
How can you know the whole?

The scientist studies a leaf, as well as a forest;
An atom, as well as the Milky Way.

Stop your vapory sputterings;
Go home, and meet yourself; search your own soul;
Grow thru your twisted delusions.

Then you may vend Utopias,
If you wish to.

.

JUDAS

I AM my own Judas;
No kiss but mine has betrayed me,
After my soul's heavy travail in many Gethsemanes.

I greedily pocket the thirty pieces of silver —
Furtive enjoyments of the forbidden by-paths,
Pleasures that bite thru the soul like acids.

And I go off and hang myself,
When I see what is best in me, the young god, the
shining one,
Betrayed by me to the death —
Led up and crucified among thieves and children of
night.

THE CREATOR

THIS is my task as Creator —
Here are my tools, deft hands and deft brain
and deft soul,
Here is my clay to work on, the brittle and flowing
me,
I am to shape a brighter and freer self therefrom.

I will roll up my sleeves, and to my task!
I will reach down into myself, into the very core
of my being,
I will firmly take the delicate materials
And shape and shape the higher self within me.

And then I will tremblingly bring him forth, new
formed,
Let him toughen and brown to the touch of the
shining universe without;
Then I, the Creator, will enter within my new self,
Discarding the old, and on to my new-opening task.

MYSELF THE MOTHER

HAIL, myself!
Hail, endless mother of my selves!

For I am a mother —
Often and often I give birth to a newer and nobler
self,
With all of the throes and throbbing pangs of par-
turation;
And this new self, full-grown, mated with the fair
reality of things,
The hard white mirth of rocks and shining seas and
flying stars,
Brings yet another self to birth, higher and freer
than the last,
And so unendingly.

How anxiously I watch each baby new self grow!
How tenderly I help him test wings and feet,
How enviously I let him go from me at last.

And O how joyously I, the full-grown new self,
Leap into the place of my mother-self,
Flame upward to my tall and shining stature!

Hail, endless mother of my selves!
Hail, myself!

CLINGING

I

WHEN I was a child
My parents trained me as a clinging vine,
Tenderly and carefully,
Around endless great images;
They bent my timid tendrils into manifold structures,
Taught me to twist around a square-hewn cross,
Stained with the hanging of a good man long ago,
And a harp and a golden crown to climb to;
Taught me to bend my soul to musty reverences and
 awes,
Taught me to interweave myself into a vast vinery
 of kinships,
Taught me to cling to countless duties to others,
Taught me to always cling.

II

And then myself, grown strong within me,
Lit by the sun's glow and the stars' summons,
Whipped by the salt tang of the sea,
And the buoyant rush of the wind on the naked
 peak,
Heartened by the fragrant shouldering of people,
Grew into this knowledge —
I was no vine, no clinger,

But a man, blend of the star-dust and the laughing
flame,
A soul, seeking freedom.

So I rose in my might, and cast away the images,
Unwove myself from them,
Broke loose with tearings and pains. . . .
And many that I found made of rotten wood
In my new-known strength I crashed to splinters,
I piled a fire of the fragments,
And danced with joy around the leaping flames.

And then, not clearly knowing myself,
I sought other images,
And clung to these as passionately as to the earlier
ones —
Images of duty to the race, vague social brother-
hoods,
The childish retreat of a mothering state,
A zealous clinging to easier faiths.

III

Nay, I see clearer now:
I must break myself free of these images,
I must unweave myself, with tearings and pains,
I must pyre the fragments,
And discard all outer supports to cling to.

For there is no support but one for me,
And that is myself;

There is no way but one to grow,
And that is to push sturdily, unclinging,
Toward the high loneliness of the stars.

I must create for myself
All duties and reverences, all forms and observances,
My test ever this — what will best lift myself;
Guiding myself in my strong and triumphant
 growth,
Pouring forth my soul and my light copiously,
Shining across the dark spaces.

OUT OF THE STORM

IT stormed last night —

(Today you are to leave us);

The trees in the park shivered,

The leaves hissed their gusty menace,

A blown surf hoarsely rousing the drowsy city;

The loose tin cornice whined and strained in the
wind. . . .

The lightning cracked the curve of the sky,

Golden and threatening;

The pallid blue glare stained the overflung roof of
black;

The harsh grumble of the thunder. . . .

A few large splashed drops,

Then the steady relief of the soothing rain.

And after sleep, we wake to a golden day,

Large-hearted and smiling.

Aye, it is thus

Out of the womb of the storm your spirit has risen,

Out of the murk you have pushed to your lofty
place,

You have flung your flame upward. . . .

The sailors toss away the last dusty rag,

The great ship aches to trample the flying spray,

Lands far away are calling, calling.

Last night I could not look at the storm,

I could only look at your face. . . .
Now your face is set to the slap of the sea-wind,
Now the salt crystals your lashes and hair,
Now the rolling waves cradle you.

Speed well!

One sun has dipped below our eastern sky,
To shine afar —
We shall shine in your place,
We shall glow thru the city so often lit with your
 laughter,
We shall set your old ways smiling back at us.

THE SHINING ONES

I

WE are the shining ones!
Laugh, children of men! Clap your hands,
little sons of earth!
The tall children of the morning are come among
you!
Laugh, and be glad!

Thru dust and sap and dancing blood each spirit
has risen;
The blind god has groped thru endless rebirths to
its own self;
Another bandage has fallen;
The shining one gleams forth over the fields of men.

So rejoice, dim ones! Lift up a song, dumb little
ones!

II

Or rise in your puny wrath against us, —
Do you think you can hurt the shining ones?

Surge upon any of us, — surge on me, overcome me,
Lead me forth manacled, every inch of my proud
body bound,
Up to your crossed logs on the hill's bald head,

Or to your steel chair, with the lightning coursing
thru it, —
Kill me, char me, annihilate me,
Me, the shining one, —
Ho! With a laugh and a leap I am free of you,
My spirit soars upward, alive and shining as ever.

Yet you, little people, stare about you in dismay;
Why are the stars in heaven paling, and the lights
on earth guttering?
What is this pall of doubt creeping on you?
What is this pale darkness you falter thru?
Ah, it is true, — you have slain a god;
The shining one has gone from among you.

III

The earth is glad when it brings us forth!
The trees and shrubs laugh into blossoming,
And compel a readjustment of the calendar!
The winds shout together, the hills roar back their
glee!
The stars fling their melody against the sounding-
board of space!
Another of the shining ones is come!

IV

Ah, there are many more of you, children of earth,
(And still more of the burrowing ants, and the lice
that devour the crops),

But you come, and you die —
And we come, and we grow.

We will not hinder your chosen tasks;
Busy yourself in your tiny eternities,
Build your bridges, uprear your palaces,
Thread the valleys with steel, tunnel my brothers
 the mountains,
Teach the seas to kiss one another;
Ever in the generations our children shine forth,
And all you have made is their heritage;
When they have dwelt upon it for a space,
They flame upward into newer birth.
Ever your children stoop to their tasks,
Lower and lower, until they stoop to their death.

v

For the sun is but a light to call you to your
 tasks,
To us he is a cloak for our climbing spirits.
The green of the spring is but a salad for your
 pots,
To us it is the laughter of our tongueless
 brothers.
The dust is but a tool and a bed for you;
To us it is the pregnant womb of our mother, our
 larger self.

Willingly we give them to you, and mockingly, —
Take of sun and green and dust, all that your arms
 can hold;

But you are blind, and they mean nothing to you;
Your spirits drag the ground.

We spring from the earth,
This spinning sea-drop flecked with brown lands,
And circle the outermost star;
Our arms round farther than the light can pierce,
Balanced in our hands the universe spins,
It is ours to play with.

VI

We will not be harsh with you, little ones;
Our shining lightens your stumbling,
We spread splendor thruout your bleak prison.

The sun flames up the thin sky,
The cloud of planets darting around his fiery head;
These dark stars fill their places;
The sun does not brush them away,
He reaches out his arms and caresses their chill
 hearts.

We will be kind to you —
Out of your dusty midst will come the shining ones,
Your dull metal will blossom into laughing gold.

VII

We are the shining ones!
Bind us or worship us, love us or cast us out,

Ever we come and come again, —
The chosen of life, the choosers of life,
The first glad shout of the universe as it rushes to
 battle,
The radiant bearers of the gleam,
The shining ones!

A PRAYER

TO that true god I call myself,
Whose form lay huddled in the earliest womb
of fiery mist;
Who slowly groped to life thru the long and bloody
generations;
Maker of all the gods, as childish playthings of joy
and terror;
Retirer of all the gods, save himself, when he stood
towering,
Shining up to man's estate and man's affairs:

God, in high loneliness apart I talk with you —
Give me always this precious communion.

Give me strength to fling aside the false gods,
Even to the last of them —
The childish toys of the race;
The fear-spurring ghosts; the faltering beliefs.

Give me the vaster strength to see and build for
myself
Man's business, and man's customs.

Keep me from the chains of ownership,
From cellaring myself in a comfortable litter of
books and pictures, clothes and possessions,
That drain my soul from my larger work.

Keep me from too great love —
Love of father, that makes me but an echo of a dying
 hero;
Love of mother, that clips my wings and manacles
 me to the prison of the past;
Love of woman, that bids me grow, flesh into flesh
 and soul into soul,
Until we sink, strangled in the embrace;
Love of friend, that plants my foot in the footsteps
 before me,
Shunning the rougher, straighter path.

Give me great love of myself —
Love that will whip me to unfold my full flowering
In the blighted gardens of men.

Keep me from dream-ridden indolence,
That softens the sinews of my spirit.

Send me forth, adventuring,
From the quick-mud of the gutter
To the clasp of the thin golden fingers of the stars.

Let me will life,
And its freshening, hearty struggles.

And when the small word comes to me that the
 end of this road is near,
God, do not let me flee my certain end;
Let me will death. . . .

Gladly, with clear vision, as a conqueror,
Let me serenely pass on the light to loftier gods,
And go forth to farther roads,
Knowing that death will come when I will have it
 come.



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